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RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 1287
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RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0754
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0334
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1568
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 2829
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1994
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI 0321
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 1365
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0892
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0837

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NDJAMENA 001166

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, D, DRL, PRM; LONDON AND PARIS FOR
AFRICAWATCHERS; GENEVA FOR CAMPBELL, DS/IP/AF,
DS/IP/ITA/WASHDC, DIA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [ASEC](#) [CD](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: FIGHTING ESCALATES IN EASTERN CHAD

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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: As Chadian forces launch an offensive against rebel groups in eastern Chad, President Deby himself has gone out to the battlefield to oversee the operations. Chadians are suspicious of French military involvement against the rebel movements, who are being reinforced by a prominent Chadian defector. The GOC is concerned that refugee camps in eastern Chad may act as bases of operations for Chadian rebel groups. END SUMMARY.

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NEW OFFENSIVE IN EASTERN CHAD
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¶2. (U) On September 20, Radio France International reported on a clash between Chadian national army forces and Chadian rebel groups in the area of Hadjer Marfaine, located between the eastern Chadian towns of Adre and Guereda. RFI noted that the Chadian rebel elements were loyal to the rebel group Rally of Democratic Forces (RaFD), which was led by Timan Erdimi, former Deby-ally and relative of the President.

¶3. (C) Elias Forsung, field security officer for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees Office in Abeche, confirmed that the fighting was taking place in eastern Chad, and said that his sources in Adre reported over 70 Chadian soldiers and an unknown number of rebels had been killed. Many of those wounded during the combat, according to Forsung, were being taken to military hospitals in Guereda and Abeche for treatment. Forsung pointed out that based on the extensive nature of the wounds, the fighting seemed extremely fierce. He also noted that President Deby was in Farchana, a town south of Adre, possibly to oversee the operations.

¶4. (C) Other embassy contacts said that, in addition to the clashes that took place between the GOC forces and the RaFD, there were separate battles involving forces loyal to Chadian rebel leader and former GOC Minister of Defense Mahamat Nouri

in the same area. According to these contacts, Nouri's troops, who entered into the fray to reinforce the RaFD's forces against the GOC, destroyed forty vehicles, captured fifty vehicles, and killed and captured many GOC soldiers (including key Republican Guard commander Hassane Kernik). They have also noted that a number of Chadian soldiers have defected to the rebel cause.

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GOC OFFENSIVE AIMED TO DESTROY REBELS, POSSIBLE FRENCH ASSISTANCE
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15. (C) Deby-loyalist and embassy contact Ambaya Mafouz told us on September 21 that President Deby was not only in eastern Chad, but right on the front lines of the conflict, and was assisting his field commanders in developing their strategy against the Chadian rebel groups. He stated that following the fighting during the previous week and sightings of rebel activity along the border over the weekend, Deby had decided to take the fight directly to the rebel movement. According to Mafouz, President Deby was extremely concerned by this recent round of fighting, as it was being led by those former Zaghawa clan members who were once loyal to President Deby and who still maintained contacts within the Chadian national army. The possibility of defections to the rebel groups and the sharing of intelligence, noted Mafouz, was much greater because of the close ethnic connections that transcended the division between the RaFD and the Chadian national army.

16. (C) Embassy contacts have also detailed information that is circulating on French involvement in the battle. Embassy contact Bakhit Tidjani, who maintains contact with the rebel movements, claimed that sources in the field reported that

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French Mirage fighter jets were being used to bomb rebel targets during the fighting in Hadjer Marfaine. Zakaria Ousman, Honorary Counsel to Pakistan, told us on September 22 that French fighter jets were being brought in from other military operations; and French cargo planes were being utilized to transport military equipment for the Chadian national army to the eastern front. French Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot told the Ambassador on September 21 that the French military was transporting 100 wounded Chadian fighters to N'Djamena for treatment, and that the GOC had assured the French Embassy that the situation "was under control."

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FIGHTERS FROM THE NORTH
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17. (C) Contacts have pointed out that Nouri's involvement in fighting out east could be potentially detrimental to the GOC's efforts to stamp out the rebel movement. Nouri had the ability to attract a number of Chadian army field commanders belonging to the Goran ethnic group. A number of Gorans in the northern Chadian region of B.E.T. were particularly disgruntled with the GOC following the Government's intervention in an intra-Goran dispute over land usage. While Chadian Minister of Territorial Administration Ahmat Mahamat Bachir, told the Ambassador on September 20 that the GOC had effectively resolved the dispute, Ousman said that many Gorans had decided to join Nouri's ranks to protest the Government's intervention in the conflict.

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CHADIAN REBELS IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS
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18. (C) During his meeting with the Ambassador on September 20, Minister Bachir stated that the GOC was becoming

increasingly worried about the possible infiltration of refugee camps by Chadian rebels, particularly after the GOC had been willing to welcome Sudanese refugees fleeing Darfur.

He said that his ministry received information that a Chadian rebel was captured during the September 11 attacks in Aram Kolla carrying UNHCR travel registration documents, and that he would pass the information to the UNHCR representative in N'Djamena, but stated that the GOC feared that the refugee camps could be used against the Chadian government.

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COMMENT
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¶9. (C) While a number of reports and views are flying around on the scale of the conflict and vulnerability of the GOC, it is clear that heavy fighting is taking place, and is serious enough to warrant a visit from President Deby himself to the region.

¶10. (U) Tripoli Minimize Considered.
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